

What does Christ Community affirm about... Church Membership?

Overview and Introduction

Christ Community affirms church membership as a suitable form to express commitment to the Lord through a local church body, a distinct relationship that allows for healthy body life.

This pamphlet defines membership according to how we understand Biblical community, and so that we might live out the gospel obediently. We make this distinction to clarify how we operate as a local body and not to create division with other congregations.

We know we cannot “be disciples who make disciples” (*our mission*) in isolation. The type of life envisioned in our mission expresses itself most clearly within a committed community of love and service – the Church. Therefore, our understanding of church membership rests on our ecclesiology - that is, our belief in what the Church is and how she functions.

The Church

God has called to himself, through Jesus, a corporate people – not a collection of individuals. As we belong to God, we belong to one another. This is *the* Church, the Bride of Christ, united by the indwelling Holy Spirit and the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Ephesians 4:4-6, Revelation 21:1-4). This wider Church, which crosses denominational lines, is called the *Church universal*.

This one-another relationship occurs through smaller, closer expressions of the Church Universal called the *local church*. We find this logical pattern taught in the Scripture and modeled by the early followers of Jesus. Our human natures often push back against a healthy relationship with a local church family.

Yet, God still calls the Church to express the reality of Jesus’ reign as an outpost of heaven in an estranged world. It is a community of new creation, worshipping, loving, and serving Christ wherever He may lead. Toward this end, God calls the church to first care radically for those invested in its community. We are responsible to these foremost (eg, Galatians 6:10), and then, in our witnessing community, to turn outward with a gospel of hope. As Jesus taught his disciples, “by this all people will know that you are my disciples – if you love one another” (John 13:35). Alternatively, an individual’s lack of stated commitment to the local church will stymie the effectiveness of the church’s mission. Membership helps us to identify healthy boundaries for the community.

Biblical Basis for Church Membership

While Church *membership* itself is not a word found in the Bible, the idea behind it is readily evident and serves to create the form we now use. Many passages show how the church body functioned together in ways that surpassed loose associations. The letters of the New Testament

were written to cities where one really only had ONE local church in which to belong. Central Virginia is a different landscape – an area of overwhelming choice in a culture where choice is king. Membership helps temper the lure of choice for the sake of newness alone.

Biblically, an agreed level of commitment enables healthy body life in the following areas:

- **In issues of authority and submission:** Church elders must give an account to God for those in their flock. How will they know who is in their charge without some form of membership? And how will the church know the leaders to whom they must submit – any elder of any church? Any pastor? (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:1-5).
- **In issues of church discipline:** Jesus and Paul speak of the church in a way that made clear distinction between those in the assembly and those on the outside. How do you remove someone from a community of faith for the purposes of restoration if they were never “in”? (Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Corinthians 2:5-11).
- **In providing responsible care:** The early church cared specifically for widows in their midst who qualified (1 Timothy 5:3-16), and elders were responsible for protecting their flocks from wolves of false doctrine and division (Acts 20:29-30). The mere idea of knowing who fell under their care indicates some type of clear demarcation.
- **In spiritual formation:** Growth, accountability, and community operate best within the safe boundaries of trust and committed relationship (eg, Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 12, Galatians 6:1-5). In many ways, church membership is like a marriage in this regard.

Therefore, functioning today, church membership has a number of benefits to both the church and to the specific believer.

For the believer, a commitment to the local church, called membership, sets up an anchor for the highs and lows of our spiritual journey – a people to whom we belong, who are committed to our life, just as we are to theirs. Without this, “if [we] view church as some sort of ecclesiological buffet, then [we] severely limit the likelihood of [our] growing into maturity.”¹

Becoming a Member

Therefore, the decision to become a member of CCC should not be one entered into lightly. Those eligible for membership have confessed Jesus Christ as Lord, received baptism, and agreed to the *Membership Commitments*, found on the form of that name.

If you’d like to know more about the process of becoming a member, please contact your small group leader and/or read the pamphlet titled, “*Are you interested in becoming a part of the CCC Family?*”

Sources:

<http://theresurgence.com/2011/07/06/is-church-membership-biblical>
http://gospeltranslations.org/wiki/Nine_Marks_of_a_Healthy_Church/A_Biblical_Understanding_of_Church_Membership

¹ Chandler, Matt. <http://theresurgence.com/2011/07/06/is-church-membership-biblical>